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Get heart-healthy for American Heart Month

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By *Capt. Joseph McQuade, M.D., family medicine physician, [Naval Hospital Jacksonville](#)*



What are you doing to get heart-healthy? Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the U.S., claiming a life every minute—and February is American Heart Month. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), one in every four deaths is from heart disease and stroke—that’s 2,200 deaths each day.

We’re all potentially at risk for heart disease—and sadly, that includes our youth, as childhood obesity rates increase at an alarming rate. Risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, cigarette smoking, sedentary lifestyle, high fat diet and being overweight or obese.

There are many steps you can take to lower your risk of developing heart disease: maintain a healthy weight, choose healthy meals and snacks, exercise regularly, don’t smoke, manage stress, limit alcohol, and manage your cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure—the single most significant risk factor for heart disease. Making positive changes in any one of these areas can make a positive difference in your health.

If you already have a medical condition like high cholesterol, high blood pressure or diabetes, there are things you can do. Manage high blood pressure—when your blood pressure stays within a healthy range, it reduces strain on your heart, arteries and kidneys. Get your cholesterol checked annually. Reduce your blood sugar to protect your vital organs. Take medicines as prescribed. And talk to your health care provider about the best ways to prevent or treat the medical conditions that lead to heart disease.

In 2014, try to make your life more “walkable.” Find a safe place to walk and do it regularly. Many studies are showing clear health benefits of regular sustained exercise. Make walking a part of your

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everyday. Parking further from the store and enjoying the walk through the parking lot, or park further from your job and walk the extra distance to and from work. By making habits of more regular exercise, you will enhance your overall fitness.

Remember, small changes matter; and it’s never too late to live a healthier life.

For more information on heart health visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/WearRed/>, <http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/index.htm>, and the American Heart Association: <http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>.

Remember, Feb. 7 is National Wear Red Day to raise awareness for heart disease in women, so show your support.

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